International Cartographic Association
Association Cartographique Internationale

Putting Phoenicia on the Map. From the Greeks to Ernest Renan's *Mission*

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Abstract: This study questions the anachronism about Phoenicia, often thought to have ended when Alexander the Great conquered the Levant. However, toponymic evidence suggests that Phoenicia came into existence with and after Alexander's conquests. Then it became an administrative division of the Roman Empire, to subsist as an ecclesiastical title down to Ottoman times. It was only in 1861 that the French scholar Ernest Renan invented and mapped "Phoenician archaeology." Later interpretations of Renan's view, converging with Biblical projections, led to the anachronistic use of "Phoenicia." This anachronism still governs historiography and politics in the Levant today.

Keywords: Phoenicia, toponymy, mapping, identity, Lebanon, Greeks, Roman Empire, Ernest Renan.

Résumé : Cette étude déconstruit l'anachronisme sur la Phénicie, considérée comme étant un « pays » avant les conquêtes d'Alexandre le Grand. Cependant, les preuves toponymiques suggèrent que la Phénicie est apparue avec et après ces conquêtes. Elle est ensuite devenue une division administrative de l'Empire romain, pour subsister comme titre ecclésiastique jusqu'à l'époque ottomane. Ce n'est qu'en 1861 que le savant français Ernest Renan invente et cartographie « l'archéologie phénicienne ». Les interprétations ultérieures de la vision de Renan, en convergence avec les projections bibliques, ont conduit à l'utilisation anachronique de « Phénicie ». Aujourd'hui, cet anachronisme régit encore l'historiographie et la politique du Levant.

Mots clés : Phénicie, toponymie, cartographie, identité, Liban, Grecs, Empire romain, Ernest Renan.

1. Introduction

In 1860 the *Mission de Phénicie* arrived at Beirut, then one of the thriving ports of the Ottoman Realm[1]. Sponsored by Emperor Napoleon III of France, the delegation was headed by the scholar Ernest Renan. It aimed at "exploring ancient Phoenicia", to establish a "Phoenician archaeology" based on findings Renan initially hoped would be abundant. The results were, however, disappointing, according to Renan himself. Yet the consequences were crucial in putting Phoenicia on the map and creating the toponymic anachronism that still governs the study of Phoenicia today.

In the Levant itself, fifty years before Renan's *Mission*, "Phoenicia" was mostly an episcopal title of the local *Rûm* (Greek Orthodox) Church hierarchy. Later, "Phoenicia" became so politically important that the Mandatory French authorities used it to craft a founding narrative for Lebanon.

In this paper, I propose a genealogy of the toponym Phoenicia and how what I call the "Phoenician anachronism" was born by superposing the archaeological findings of the Levantine city-states on the Roman administrative unit of Maritime Phoenicia. I focus on Ernest Renan's *Mission*, using his writings, notably a report he submitted to Napoleon III (See Renan 1864).

Through a selection of primary sources and maps, I discuss the birth of the toponym Phoenicia as an ambiguous geographical construct in Greek literature. I show how the toponym evolved into a Roman administrative unit, then subsequently persisted as an ecclesiastical title down to the Nineteenth Century's Ottoman Empire. With the *Mission de Phénicie*, Renan's findings participated in shaping out an anachronistic pre-Alexandrian Phoenicia. In the end, I propose a pattern of Phoenician anachronism.

I use toponyms and related demonyms as markers of identity. The article is exploratory and aims at understanding the dynamics by which an undefined name becomes a toponym of a defined space, then a political claim[2]. I shall use "Phoenicia" and "Phoenicians", as a toponym and its derived demonym.

2. Phoenicia, a genealogy of a toponym

2.1 Born in Greece, in Greek

Phoinikos and *phoinix* are polysemic: they can mean a palm tree, the phoenix, various shades of the colour red, Phoenicians, Punics, Carthage, and Phoenicia[3]. Phoenicia, as a place name, was born an exonym, around the Aegean

[1] For more information on Beirut see Kassir, 2003; Davie, 1996.

[2] The paper uses primary sources in Greek, Latin, Arabic, and French. It does not consider Syriac ones. An extensive study of all possible sources can establish more comprehensive results. The paper analyses numerous toponyms and demonyms, all of them were not standardised before the 18th Century CE and may be written, spelled, and pronounced in different ways.

[3] For a detailed account see Liddel and Scott, 1883, 1685-1686.

Proceedings of the International Cartographic Association, 3, 2021.
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https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021

Sea. Around the 8th Century BCE, Homer's Iliad presents "Phoenicians" as sailors who brought a beautiful silver cup made by the Sidonians (Homer, *Iliad*, Book XXIII, lines 740-745).[4] In the Odyssey, "Phoenicia" is a place in the easternmost part of the Mediterranean (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book IV, lines 80-85). There are numerous references to the derived demonym "Phoenicians" as eastern Mediterranean sailors, talented in commerce, in the works of Plato and other authors of Classical Greece. Herodotus, c. 430 BCE, mentions "Phoenicia" and "Phoenicians" many times in his writings, asserting that it is, above all, a coast (Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book IV, 39). According to him, the Greeks learned the alphabet from the Phoenician Cadmos and his companions (*Idem*, Book V, 59). He makes it the home of Europa *(Idem,* Book IV, 46), who left Tyre to sail to Crete:

> ...unless we say that the land took its name from the Tyrian Europa, having been (it would seem) before then nameless like the rest. But it is plain that this woman was of Asiatic birth, and never came to this land which the Greeks now call Europe, but only from Phoenicia to Crete and from Crete to Lycia. Thus, much I have said of these matters, and let it suffice; we will use the names established by custom.

"Phoenicia" becomes recurrent in Greek tragedies, the *Phoenician Women* of Euripides being the most prominent example. The dialogue in the play talks about Phoenicia as a land (Euripides, *Phoenissae*, lines 275-285)[5]:

> Polyneices [son of Oedipus]: Ladies of another land, tell me from what country do you come to the halls of Hellas?
>
> Chorus: Phoenicia is my country where I was born and bred; the grandsons of Agenor sent me here as first-fruits of the spoil of war for Phoebus.

Outside Greek writings, no mention of Phoenicia was attested. In the 11th Century BCE, the ancient Egyptian story of Wenamun, priest of Amun and envoy of Ramses XI, mentions Tyre and Byblos as two different realms (Harper and Breasted, 1906, 279), but no Phoenicia or Phoenicians. Assyrian texts are abundant with references to "kings of the seacoast, people of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and Arvad," and consider them as skilled sailors, but do not confer common identity on them (Luckenbill and Breasted, 1926, 166; 1927, 145). Even their Hebrew neighbours did not know about the existence of a Phoenicia: Different Biblical texts make numerous references to Sidon, Tyre, Gebal (Byblos), and their peoples and kings, considering them as different city-states, skilled merchants, and sailors[6]. Yet, they had no common collective identity, nor a common belonging of the kind present among the Greeks and the Hebrews (Quinn, 2017, 61-62). "Phoenicia" was the toponym established by the Greeks, for a place that did not exist *per se* and had no "ethnic group" related to it outside the Greek cosmography. Citizens of Levantine city-states, Tyrians, Sidonians, Aradians, did cooperate and might have founded Tripoli together, yet they continued to be autonomous polities and did not constitute a coherent group, and many were already Hellenised (*Idem*, 67-68). When Alexander laid siege to Tyre, the Sidonians came to his aid (*Idem*, 47, 68).

2.2 Towards the "Phoenicisation" of the Levantine coast

Following the death of Alexander the Great (c. 323 BCE), the Levantine coastline became an area of conflict between two rival Macedonian dynasties: the Seleucids, ruling from Antioch on the Orontes, and the Ptolemies, ruling from Alexandria in Egypt. During this period, later called "Hellenistic", the city-states were fully integrated into the Greek world (Aliquot and Bonnet, 2013). It is during this period that we see the emergence of some "Phoenicianness" among the inhabitants of the coast of the Levant, marked by the adoption of Koine Greek as the *lingua franca* to replace their local dialects.

For the first time, the Levantine coast is under the suzerainty of those who thought of it as Phoenicia, be they Seleucids or Ptolemies. Local culture began to adapt. One of the earliest examples might be the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, done in Egypt during the 3rd and 2nd Centuries BCE. The "merchants of Sidon" mentioned in Isaiah 23:2 was translated into *Phoinikes*, "Phoenicians"[7]. The introduction of Phoenicia into the Hebrew Bible was not universal: "Canaan" and "Canaanites" continued to be used in most occurrences (Quinn, *Op. Cit.*, 37).

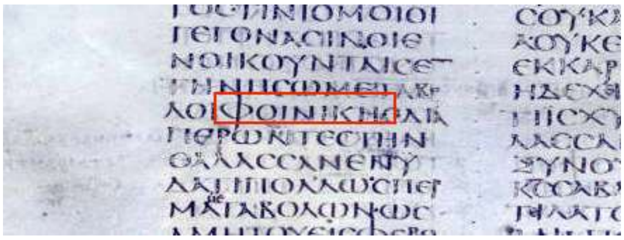


Figure 1. The word *Phoinikes* written in the *Codex Sinaiticus*, a Fourth-Century copy of the Septuagint. Courtesy of https://codexsinaiticus.org. Accessed 25 March 2021.

In Phoenicia itself, no political framework was created to fit the toponym. The city-states continued to be autonomous but began to issue coins with symbols stemming from the Greek view of the Phoenician identity[8]. For example, on some Tyrian coins, a palm tree, *phoinix*[9], is visible on the reverse (Quinn, *Op. Cit.*, 137-140).

4 For classical references I mention the book number and the correspondent lines.

5 In Greek Φοίνισσα μὲν γῆ πατρὶς ἡ θρέψασά με.

6 For example, see 2 Sam. 27:7, Ezr. 3:7, Ps. 83:7, Is. 23, Ezk. 27:3-8

7 In the same Chapter 23:11 "Canaan" is kept as is in the Septuagint, but in some modern Bible versions it is translated as "Phoenicia." (For example, see the English CEB and NIV, the French BDS, and the Spanish NTV).

8 With the local assimilation of Greek divinities.

9 In Greek φοῖνιξ.

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The Levantine coast was placed under the hegemony of the Roman Republic by Pompey (64 BCE) and became part of the province of Syria whose seat was Antioch. For the first time in history, an administrative "real" Phoenicia was born, as an eparchy of Roman Syria, itself a Roman new creation that did not exist before (Keilo, 2020). Still, the toponym Phoenicia was for an undefined space around the easternmost part of the Mediterranean. The Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, who lived in the first half of the 1st Century CE, gives an account about it in Chapter XI of his *De situ Orbis*, specifying that Phoenicia is between Palestine and Antiochia [*sic*][10] (Griffin, 1917, 52). Then he continues and gives his detailed description of Phoenicia in Chapter XII (*Idem*, 53), calling Phoenicians "a skilful race of men" and "inventors of the alphabet." Other classical Latin authors are inspired by Greek writings and mention Phoenicia in its Greek perspective: Virgil, Pliny, Cicero, amongst others.

In the Biblical text, the "Canaanite woman[11]" of Matthew the Evangelist (Mt. 15:22-29) is the "Syrophoenician woman[12]" for Mark (Mk. 7:24-29). Mark described her as a Greek too. The New Testament account linked her to a place: "Syrophoenicia" (or Phoenicia Syria), and "Canaan" without necessarily defining the one or the other. The Book of Acts of the Apostles refers to Phoenicia as related to Tyre and Roman Syria (Acts 11:19, 15:3, 21:2).

2.3 The Imperial and glorious moments of the toponym Phoenicia

During the Second Century CE Phoenicia was still a part of the Roman province of Syria. Around the year 150 CE, in his *Geography*, Claudius Ptolemy includes it in his *tabulae* (Siniscalchi and Palagiano, 2018).

Around the year 200 CE, a thousand years after the appearance of the word "Phoenicia" in Greek texts, the name became an official political unit of the Roman Empire. Emperor Septimius Severus[13] and his Senate decided to divide the province of Syria into two: Coele Syria [Hollow Syria] in the North and Phoenicia Syria[14] in the South. The new province covered the triangle between the Mediterranean and Palmyra in the Syrian steppe and was centred on Tyrus [Tyre], with Emesa [Homs], Damascus, and Heliopolis [Baalbeck] as main cities. In his history of the Empire, the Roman civil servant Herodian writes that Emperor Heliogabalus was the son of "Maesa, a Phoenician woman, from Emesa in Phoenicia" (Herodian, Book V, 13). Its main cities, Tyre, Berytus [Beirut], Emesa, Heliopolis, Damascus, and Palmyra enjoyed tax exemptions or the *ius Italicum*, according to the Digest of the Roman Law (Justinian, The Digest of the Roman Law, Book 50, Title 15)[15]. Thus, Phoenicians were proud Roman citizens who did identify as Romans and participated in the government and affairs of the Empire. Emperor Alexander Severus was born in Arca Caesarea of this newly established province (Benario, 2001). During that period Heliodorus of Emesa calls himself Phoenician (Quinn, *Op. Cit.*, 135).

The *Tabula Peutingeriana* or *Tabula Theodosiana*[16], a medieval copy of a Third-and-Fourth Century *cursus publicus* map, shows the political unit as "Syria Phoenix." By then, along with all the Roman provinces between the Taurus mountains and Sinai, Phoenicia was a part of the Civil Diocese of the East in Antioch[17], established in the late Third Century CE and was of exceptional military and commercial importance to the Roman Empire. In this East, Phoenicia was "a province full of beauty and elegance," with Tyre as capital, followed by Sidon, Berytus, Emesa, and Damascus, according to Marcellinus (†c. 400), himself a native of the region (Marcellinus, 1911, 28).



Figure 2. Tabula Peutingeriana, detail with the toponym "Syria Phoenix." The image is courtesy of the Wikipedia page of the Tabula.

Around the year 400 CE, under Emperor Arcadius, Phoenicia Syria itself was divided into two new provinces: the first is Maritime Phoenicia[18] (governed from Tyre), extending along the coast between the present-day towns of Tartous and Acre; the second is Lebanese Phoenicia[19] (governed from Emesa then from Damascus), covering the Anti-Lebanon and the territories to the east, all the way to Palmyra. The *Notitia Dignitatum* mentions the two Phoenicias this way with their proper military[20]. The lists of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, in 451 CE, give a detailed account of the administrative borders of both Maritime and Lebanese Phoenicias. The Maritime spread between Antrados [Tartous] in the north and

[10] Syria occupies a wide strip of seacoast, and even wider districts inland, called by different names in different places (for it is called Coele, Mesopotamia, Damascene, Adiabene, Babylonia, Judaea, Comagene. Here where it touches Arabia, we find Palaestine, then Phoenicia, and where it joins Gilicia, it is called Antiochia).

[11] In Greek Χαναναία.

[12] In Greek Συροφοινίκισσα.

[13] It is possible that Septimius Severus, a Punic married to an Emesan, wanted to consolidate some Phoenician belonging (Hall, 2004, 93). But Severus did not "restore an ancient regional name" as this regional name did not exist before the Graeco-Roman era.

[14] Or Syrian Phoenicia. In Greek Φοινίκη Συρία.

[15] According to Ulpian (†223), himself from Tyre and one of the most eminent Roman jurists.

[16] For more information on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* see https://centrici.hypotheses.org/1177.

[17] In Latin *Dioecesis Orientis* and in Greek Διοίκηση Ανατολής.

[18] In Greek Φοινίκη Παραλία.

[19] In Greek Φοινίκη Λιβανησία.

[20] The *Notitia Dignitatum* is a document on the organisation of the Roman Empire, East and West. It is available from http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost05/Notitia/not_intr.html (Accessed 24 March 2021) and other sites.

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Ptolemais [Acre] in the south and included the region around Caesarea Philippi [Paneas] of Mount Hermon. The Lebanese Phoenicia was between Heliopolis [Baalbeck] and Palmyra, also covering the Anti-Lebanon, Damascus, and Emesa (Rustum, 1988 [1], 339).

The First Phoenicia, the Maritime one, reached new peaks with the Roman Law School in Berytus[21]. It was mentioned in the enacting Imperial Constitution of the Digest of Roman Law where Emperor Justinian calls Beirut *nutrix legum* (Justinian, *Op. Cit.*, *Constitutio Omnem*, 7). The Roman emperor orders the governor of the province to supervise Law students (*Idem*, 10)[22]:

> In the city of Berytus the most illustrious President of the Maritime Phoenicia, together with the most blessed Bishop and the professors of law of that city shall discharge this duty.

Phoenicia is by now a confirmed toponym of two Roman provinces, the one is maritime and the other inland. All official existence of all the two Phoenicias ends in the Fourth Decade of the 7th Century with the Arab conquest. The new conquerors change the political divisions and Phoenicia was taken off the map.

2.4 The Roman continuity in an Arabic "Coast"

The local *Rûm* Melkite[23] population, Arabised or Greek-speaking, continued to use the toponym "Phoenicia" in their geography. The Mount Sinai Codex 151, maybe the oldest surviving translation of the Bible into Arabic (before 867 CE)[24], uses the word *Fûniqi*[25] to translate Acts 21:2[26]. This translation might be the oldest version of the Arabic name of Phoenicia. In the same chapter, Jerusalem is translated into *Bayt El Maqdis*[27], and Syria into *El Sham*[28]. But Phoenicia is transliterated: would this fact mean that there was no equal Arabic word? The translator adds a note on *Fûniqi*, explaining that "It is Homs [Emesa]"[29], the ancient metropolis of Lebanese Phoenicia[30] (Saint Catherine's Monastery, Image 237)[31].



Figure 3. Acts of the Apostles 21, from the Mount Sinai Codex 151 (c.867 CE), with the translation of Phoenicia into *Fûniqi* and the note to the left "It is Homs." Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Agapius of Hierapolis (†c. 942) uses the word accordingly and writes "wilderness of Phoenicia"[32] to refer to the steppe between Emesa and Palmyra, in the former province of Lebanese Phoenicia (Agapius of Hierapolis, 1986, 99, 102).

In the Roman Empire, authors continue to use the toponym to refer to the Levantine coast. At the beginning of the 9th Century CE, Theophanes the Confessor uses it more than once in his chronicles, referring to the Maritime and the Lebanese Phoenicias. He quotes Procopius of Caesarea of the 6th Century CE, writing about the Numidians: "The Moors were driven out of Phoenicia by Joshua, son of Nûn" (Procopius, 1916, 287-291; Theophanes the Confessor, 1997, 310). Both insert the Roman administrative divisions in the Biblical pre-Roman scene. Later, the Roman emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (†959) quotes Theophanes the Confessor writing about the "Arabs who live in Palestine, Phoenicia, and Damascus" (Constantine VII, 21). With the Roman reconquest of northern Syria, "Maritime Phoenicia" and "Lebanese Phoenicia" are used for Gabala, Tripoli, Beirut, Tyre, Emesa, and Damascus (Leo the Deacon, 2005, 208-209; Skylitzes, 2010, 260, 273, 322, 357). Meanwhile, the local historian Yahya of Antioch (†c. 1066), a bilingual *Rûm* Christian, uses the words "Coast" and "Coasts" for Maritime Phoenicia, in continuity with Roman but also

[21] For more information about the metropolis of Berytus of Phoenicia during Roman times see Hall, 2004, 105-113.

[22] In Latin "In Berytiensium autem civitate tam vir clarissimus praeses Poenicae maritimae quam beatissimus eiusdem civitatis episcopus et legum professores."

[23] The local *Rûm* or Melkite community are the Levantine Christians in communion of faith with the eastern Roman Empire. Today they are known as Greek Orthodox.

[24] Not the entire Bible but only the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.

[25] In Arabic فونيقي.

[26] "And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth."

[27] In Arabic بيت المقدس, the traditional Arabic medieval name of Jerusalem.

[28] In Arabic الشام, the traditional name of Syria and the Levant.

[29] In Arabic أي حمص.

[30] Curiously enough, Acts 21 says that "the ship landed at Tyre." But apparently, for the author, "Phoenicia" would have been more related to Emesa, even if it is an inland city with no port.

[31] The manuscript is also available from the https://sinaimanuscripts.library.ucla.edu, a publication of St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai in collaboration with EMEL and UCLA. Accessed 26 March 2021.

[32] In Arabic برية فونيقية.

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Arab geographies, as shown below (Yahya of Antioch, 126-127, 291)[33].

Since the 640s, the Arabs divided the Levant into *ajnad*[34], in which Phoenicia had no administrative existence: Antrados [Tartous] belonged to Homs *jund*, while Beirut and Sidon belonged to Damascus. Tyre was incorporated into the Jordan *jund* (Yaqubi, 2002, 160-167). Arab geographers do not seem aware of a "Phoenicia." Yet, curiously enough, some speak of "the Coast"[35], "the Coast of Sham"[36], or the "Coast Country [Countries]"[37] as a proper noun. In the early Ninth Century, Waqidi[38], one of the first Muslim chroniclers, writes about "conquering the Coast Country" (Waqidi, 1997, 26). Yaqubi (†897) calls Tyre "the [mother] city of the Coast[s]" (Yaqubi, *Op. Cit.*, 165). Other geographers and chroniclers use the word *Sawahil* for the Levantine shore to the north of Acre and the south of Latakia[39]. Would "Coast" be a loan translation for the Graeco-Roman "Maritime" Phoenicia?[40]

During the Crusades, William of Tyre (†c. 1185) and Jacques of Vitry (†1240) mention the Maritime and the Lebanese Phoenicias in their Graeco-Roman borders and limits, undoubtedly based on the administrative and ecclesiastical geographies still known in the Roman Empire[41] (William of Tyre, Book XI, Chap. 9, 13, 14; Book XVII, Chap. 14; Book XXI, Chap. 11; Jacques of Vitry, Book III). William of Tyre goes on to call Damascus the "metropolis of Little Syria, otherwise called Lebanese Phoenicia" (*Idem*, Book XVII, Chap. 3). The pilgrim Johannes Phocas wrote about Tyre being "the most beautiful city of Phoenicia." Yet, he speaks of Beirut as the border between Phoenicia and Syria (Phocas, 1889, 9-10): Was he following the administrative geography of the Crusader kingdoms, where the borders between Jerusalem and Tripoli are some kilometres to the north of Beirut?

2.5 America, Phoenicia, Judaea

In Western countries, Ptolemaic geography was still at the base of world maps. In 1507, in the first map known to mention the toponym "America", by Martin Waldseemüller (†1519), the world is not only mapped after Ptolemy's *Geography* but also after Amerigo Vespucci's journeys (Waldseemüller, 1507). America came to existence as an undefined place. Phoenicia and Judaea are present on the same map, too. Judaea vanished from Roman administrative maps when Hadrian was emperor (†138), and Phoenicia came into existence c.200 CE to disappear as an administrative unit in the 7th Century, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, both are present at the same time, on the same map, with the very newly named America.



Figure 4. The Waldseemüller Map of 1507 CE, a detail showing Syria, Phoenicia, and Judaea. The image is courtesy of the Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

The tendency continues: "Phoenicia" appears sporadically on some maps, most of them depicting "the Holy Land", or the Levant seen from a Biblical perspective (For example see Liébaux, 18th Century; d'Anville, 1752; Arrowsmith, 1815; 1828).

2.6 The Ottoman *Rûm* ecclesiastical Phoenicias

On the other hand, in the first half of the 16th Century, the Ottoman *Book of Navigation* continues to use the plural expression *Sawahil Sham* "Seacoasts of Sham[42]," of the Arabic-speaking geographers for the Levantine coast, especially around Tripoli and Beirut (Piri Reis, c. 1525, W.658.316.A; W.658.317B). Simultaneously, the book uses the word *sahil* (in singular) for Egypt and the same plural *sawahil* for North Africa. In other terms, no singularity was given for the Levantine coast. The Ottoman *Cedid Atlas* (1803) does not use the term and ignores the existence of Phoenicia.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the former two provinces named "Phoenicia" were present only in titles used by local *Rûm* (that is, Greek Orthodox) Christians of the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. In the list of episcopal titles, for instance, the Archbishop of Tyre and Sidon is "*exarchos* over the *Paralias* (Maritime)[Phoenicia]." The Archbishops of Beirut and Tripoli are "over First [Maritime] Phoenicia." Archbishops of Emesa, Heliopolis, and Palmyra are "over the whole of Lebanese Phoenicia" (Charon, 1907, 225-226; Rustum, 1988 [2], 61-62). By then, the two Phoenicias were mere honorary titles of Church prelates.

[33] In the Sinai Arabic Codex 417, Synaxarium (c.1095, translated from the original Greek one written under Emperor Constantine VII), the word *balad Bisri* or *balad Bisra* بلد بسرى is used for the place in which are Beirut [Berytus] and Baalbeck [Heliopolis]. The codex is available from https://sinaimanuscripts.library.ucla.edu (See Footnote 27).

[34] In Arabic أجناد, meaning "military divisions."

[35] In Arabic الساحل.

[36] In Arabic ساحل بحر الشام.

[37] In Arabic بلاد السواحل.

[38] Attributed, not confirmed.

[39] For example, in Maqdisi, 186; Ibn Khordadhbeh, 1889, 97-98; Yaqut El Hamwi, 1995, 133. Idrissi (†1165), one of the most eminent medieval geographers, does not seem to be aware of "Phoenicia" or of its "Coast."

[40] At the same time, all the above-mentioned Arab authors are conscious of the toponym "Palestine" and use it in their geographies and chronicles.

[41] See the accounts of Agapius of Hierapolis, Theophanes the Confessor, and Emperor Constantine VII, *supra*.

[42] In Osmanli سواحل شام.

https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021 |

3. The *Mission* of Ernest Renan, Phoenicia on the map again

3.1 The revival of some "Phoenicia"

Renan was certainly not the first intellectual to be interested in Phoenicia. In 1758, Jean-Jacques Barthélemy deciphered the Phoenician alphabet (Barthélemy, 1764), and Arnold Heeren wrote about Phoenicians as a "nation of Antiquity" (Heeren, 1833). Both, like many others, saw Phoenicia in the perspective of Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the Bible, following the projections made by Christian Roman authors, as shown above.

The Nineteenth Century began with a revival of Philhellenism (Tolias, 2017), simultaneous to the Greek Revolution. "The French are by tradition Philhellenes" (*Idem*, 51), and Phoenicia was seen in this perspective. De Chateaubriand and de Lamartine did not explore Phoenicia but "Lebanon" as a mountain, with the latter speaking about "Phoenicians, who measure their enterprises only by the material utility", in an argument worthy of ancient Greeks (Lamartine, 1842, 61).

Renan[43] was elected to the prestigious French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1856. "Phoenician inscriptions" were being debated in the savant milieu in France at the time. The sarcophagus of Eshmunazar, king of Sidon, was discovered in 1855[44] and had a long inscription in Phoenician letters. Later, in 1856, it was offered to the Louvre by the Duc de Luynes (de Luynes, 1856, vi), himself a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. The sarcophagus' discovery led to some "unearthing" of Phoenicia. For example, in 1859, a well-known local Maronite author, Tannous Chidiac, wrote his book on the chronicles of Mount Lebanon. He writes that "Lebanon is four days long, in Phoenicia of Syria Secunda, in the fifth zone of the third clime, and Phoenicia means the palm land" (Chidiac, 1859, 5). Chidiac followed the Graeco-Roman geography and its Arabic descendant, yet with the Biblical projection of the toponym. He goes on to say that "Beirut was called after Baal Beryte the Phoenician god" and "Tyre was known in Phoenician days..." (*Idem*, 8, 12). Phoenicia was by then a debated subject, after the discovery of Eshmunazar's sarcophagus; it was no more reserved for the Greek Orthodox episcopal.

3.2 A mission to "unearth Phoenician civilisation"

In 1857 Renan read a report on Sanchoniathon before the Académie, followed in 1858 by a full report on the "real character of Phoenician history" (Renan, 1857; 1858) where he considers Phoenicia a "country[45]" (*Idem*, 1858). Renan was one of the renowned philologists of Semitic languages in France[46]. Such conditions made him the ideal candidate to head an archaeological mission to the Levant, on the recommendation of Hortense Cornu, a mutual friend of Napoleon III and Renan (Pommier, 1965, 128; Robin, 2011, 140-141). After some negotiations, in May 1860 the Emperor formally asked Renan to head the mission, after the savant expressed his wish more precisely: "Dig up the ancient Phoenicia, who knows what this land hides"[47] (Robin, *Idem*). Renan was interested in the history of Christianity and wanted to go to the Holy Land to prepare for his work on the life of Jesus Christ (Renan, 1863).

The international conditions were rather propitious: after the 1860 civil war in the Levant, the French *expédition de Syrie* disembarked in Beirut in August 1860, in the name of protection of Christians. In October, the *Mission de Phénicie* was created by a ministerial decree (Robin, *Op. Cit.*, 135), some weeks before Renan's arrival in Beirut[48].



Figure 5. The map of the places explored by the *Mission de Phénicie*, by Ernest Renan (From the *Planches*). The image is courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[43] Renan was, indeed, a Philhellene. For more information on the subject see Renan, 2009.

[44] by Alphonse Durighello, then vice-consul of France in Sidon.

[45] In French "pays."

[46] In 1862, Renan became the professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France.

[47] In French "Fouillez la vieille Phénicie, on ne sait pas ce que cache cette terre."

[48] Renan's mission was not only one sent by Napoleon III, but there were also Auguste Mariette's in Egypt, Léon Heuzey's in Northern Greece, Fulgence Fresnel, F. Thomas et Jules Oppert in Mesopotamia, and Georges Perrot in Asia Minor (Robin, 2011, 137).

8th International Symposium of the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography, 21–23 April 2020, Istanbul, Turkey (rescheduled for December 2021, Florence, Italy). This contribution underwent single-blind peer review based on submitted abstracts.
https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021 |

In the Levant, the *Mission de Phénicie* carried out four campaigns of excavations: Arwad, Antrados (Tartous), and Marathos (Amrit) in the north; Byblos (Gebeil); Sidon; and Tyre, corresponding to the "four main centres of the Phoenician civilisation" (Renan, 1861, 3). Renan himself shuttled between the different excavation sites and explored the epigraphs around Mount Lebanon, then Galilee and Judaea in Palestine. In the spring of 1861, French troops left Lebanon, with the instauration of the Mutassarifate government[49]. In September 1861, during a visit to Byblos, Renan's sister, Henriette, succumbed to a paludism crisis, while he was evacuated to France suffering from the same sickness (Baclou, 2014, 17).

3.3 From a "country" to some ports…

For Renan himself, the results of the *Mission de Phénicie* were humble (Renan, 1864, 814-817)[50]. In his report submitted to Emperor Napoleon III, Renan was not the merriest about his discoveries: for him, Phoenician archaeology, inscriptions, and material culture's findings were largely unsatisfying *(Idem*; Renier, 1861).

Before his journey, Renan had considered Phoenicia a country (Renan, 1858, 243). However, with the *Mission*, his view evolved and changed. Phoenicia became a mere series of ports (Renan, 1864, 836)[51]:

> Phoenicia was not a country; it was a series of ports, with a rather narrow suburb. These cities, situated ten or twelve leagues from each other, were the centre of some municipal life like the Greek cities. The Phoenician civilisation did not spread to the mountains and had little effect on the population of Syria. Before the Greek domination, Lebanon, Coele Syria, and Syria were completely backward countries. The roads in these regions, which were not very practicable, were built by the Romans (as we know from the inscriptions); even the Roman roads, for example, those of the River Lycus [Nahr el Kalb], were never able to give way to vehicles.

Renan goes on with even harsher judgements on the absence of originality in Phoenician art or on its imitating character (*Idem*, 820, 825; Will, 1984, 11-12). In all his arguments, Renan had one authority: Graeco-Roman Antiquity *(Idem*, 829-830), and he evaluated the Levantine pre-Alexandrian city-states from this perspective.

Simultaneously, Renan had sent most of the 120 found objects to the Louvre, where they constituted a substantial part of the important *Antiquités orientales* collection (Louvre, 2021). "Phoenicia" became a place name associated with some archaeology of the Near East. Despite the loss of his sister, Renan kept good memories of his Levantine excavations and mapping[52].

3.4 …But a long-lasting toponymic (re)invention

The consequences of the *Mission* were quite important in terms of (re)invented toponymy: in his pre-*Mission* and then report writings, Renan used "Phoenicia" as the toponym to refer to the Levantine city-states before Alexander and the Greeks. As showed above, "Phoenicia" became a part of the landscape in the Levant precisely because of Graeco-Roman literature and politics. Before their era, no Phoenicia existed *in situ*. Renan was undoubtedly conscious of this fact, being a Philhellene and familiar with Graeco-Roman writings. As also discussed earlier, Renan stopped considering Phoenicia as a country and was disappointed by the findings. Nonetheless, the name "Phoenicia" was again put on the map as a historical reality: an imaginary pre-Alexandrian Phoenicia was invented and inserted into the historical scene of the Levant, because of Renan's work, but also out of an anachronistic superposition of Graeco-Roman and Biblical sources.

There is still a question about Renan's use of primary sources in his supposed mapping of ancient Phoenicia, and his elaboration of a very precise action plan (Robin, *Op. Cit.*, 127). As shown earlier, medieval sources, Roman and Western, do refer to Lebanese Phoenicia. Renan was undoubtedly conscious of Lebanese Phoenicia's existence, but he only uses "Phoenicia" for the seaports, the ancient Maritime Phoenicia. He seems to (intentionally?) ignore the Lebanese Phoenicia, with its main cities: Damascus, Emesa, Heliopolis, and Palmyra. Was Renan only interested in ancient Greek sources of Homer and playwrights who conceived Phoenicia as an amorphous narrow Levantine seacoast?

It is a plausible explanation, as Renan says that "Laodicea [Latakia] is the extreme-north limit of Phoenicia and almost a Phoenician colony. Beyond it, it is Greek, Roman, and Christian Syria that must be sought" (Renan, 1864, 112). He also quotes M. Thobois, the mission's illustrator, saying that Gabala [Jableh]'s Roman Amphitheatre is the "most beautiful Roman monument of the coast of Phoenicia" (*Idem*, 111). Laodicea was founded by Seleucus Nicator (†281 BCE), Alexander's general, after the alleged "end of Phoenician history." Gabala's

[49] The Mutassarifate of Mount Lebanon was the Ottoman subdivision that governed Mount Lebanon 1861-1918 and resulted from the Ottoman reforms (*Tanzimat*). For more information see Salibi, 1965.

[50] As notes J.-C. Robin: The *Mission* resulted in a paradox: all Biblical or classical civilisations left remarkable monuments and epigraphic evidence, but not the supposed Phoenicians in their supposed homeland Phoenicia (Robin, *ibid.*, 132).

[51] In French "La Phénicie ne fut pas un pays ; ce fut une série de ports, avec une banlieue assez étroite. Ces villes, situées à dix ou douze lieues l'une de l'autre, furent le centre d'une vie toute municipale comme les villes grecques. La civilisation phénicienne ne rayonna pas dans la montagne et eut peu d'action sur la population de la Syrie. Avant la domination grecque, le Liban, la Coelésyrie et la Syrie furent des pays complètement arriérés. Les routes quelque peu praticables de ces régions sont l'ouvrage des Romains (les inscriptions nous l'apprennent); même les routes romaines, celles du fleuve du Chien, par exemple, n'ont jamais pu livrer passage à des véhicules."

[52] In 1891, some months before his death, Renan went to Provence in the French south. Upon seeing the Mediterranean sun, he exclaimed "Syria, Dear Syria!" (In French *La Syrie, la chère Syrie !*). See Pommier, *Op. Cit.*, 10.

https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021

Amphitheatre was constructed by the Romans. Both were not a part of the Roman province of Phoenicia. One may ask: in this case which Phoenicia is Renan's? The undefined ancient Greek pre-Alexandrian one could be an answer. In other terms, Renan's Phoenicia is the virtual, rather imaginary one, filling the space between Greece and Judaea (Bonnet, 2012), as "Greece has a special role, like Judaea, a role in which it will never be equalled" (*Idem*, 830)[53].

4. Aftermath: Phoenicia becomes a historical "reality"

This imaginary Phoenicia entered historiography and cartography as a reality, not only in France but also in the Ottoman Realm, then the sovereign entity over the Levant. The toponym was used, anachronistically, for Biblical maps to refer to the Sidonians and the Tyrians of the Ancient Testament. Already, in the popular Van Dyck-Smith Arabic translation of the Bible, the versions illustrated with maps showed a "Phoenicia" in the time of David and Solomon. The Jesuit version of the Bible did the same. When Youssef Debs, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, wrote his *History of Syria*, he consecrated a whole chapter to a Phoenicia that already existed "before the conquest of Palestine by Joshua son of Nûn," while acknowledging that its name was a later Greek invention (Debs, 1904, 249-251).

At another level, the Ottoman central one, Phoenicia made an appearance on the map, we see it already written on Ottoman maps of the *Fin-de-Siècle* (Foster, 2013). In 1887 or 1888, an administrative map by the Ottoman Erkân-ı Harbiye-i (Army Staff) shows the toponym *Finike*[54] on the space between Beirut and Acre. The name had no real administrative function, except maybe to follow a certain cartographic fashion.

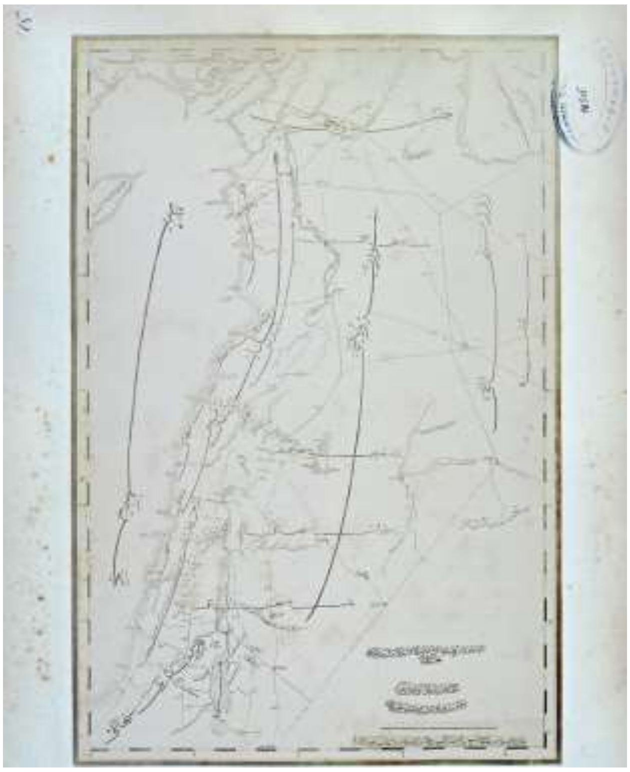


Figure 6. An 1887/1888 Ottoman administrative map of the Levant, with the name *Finike* shown between Beirut and Acre. Image shared on social networks by Mr Mohamed Alsalloum.

Later, the atlas used by the Ottoman Military College uses "state of Phoenicia[55]" abundantly and makes it a state contemporary to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, then to the Two Hebrew kingdoms of Judaea and Samaria (Esref, 1913).

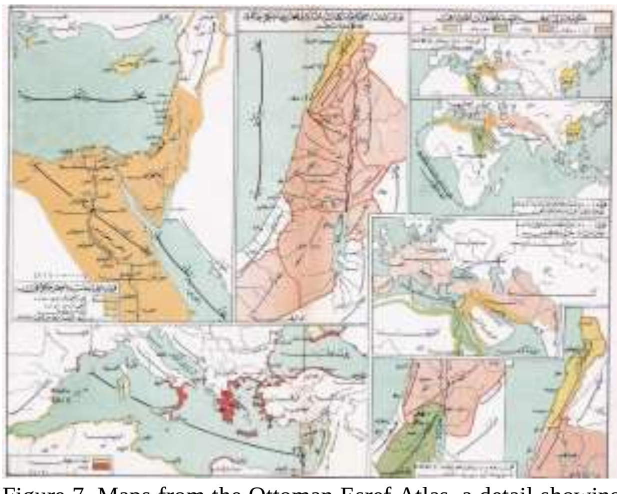


Figure 7. Maps from the Ottoman Esref Atlas, a detail showing the "state of Phoenicia" as the neighbour of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the later kingdoms. The image is courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection.

I will not present the dynamics by which the "Phoenician reality" became a political claim. But it is useful to present

[53] In French "...la Grèce a un rôle à part, comme la Judée, rôle où elle ne sera jamais égalée."

[54] In Osmanli فنكه.

[55] In Osmanli فنيكه حكومتى.

https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021 |

some results of the anachronism. In 1919, the Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek[56] travelled to the post-WWI peace conference at Versailles, to plead for a Lebanese state under French protection. In his speech before the Conference, he positioned emerging Lebanon as the continuity of a Phoenicia dating back to pre-Christian and pre-Alexandrian times. Patriarch Hoyek echoed ideas promoted by the *Revue phénicienne*, founded the same year in Beirut by Charles Corm (Ippolito, 2011). Paradoxically, it is from the Mountain, considered as definitively non-Phoenician by Renan, that this "Phoenicianism" came.

One year later, General Henri Gouraud, the French High Commissioner in the Levant, declared the State of Greater Lebanon as a successor state of the Ottoman Empire. Mount Lebanon of the Mutassarifate annexed the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre, and the Bekaa Valley. Gouraud used the stereotypes of Phoenicia and Phoenicians, used since Homer, in his formal declaration speech (Lammens, 1921 [2], 263)[57]:

> On the shores of the legendary sea that witnessed the triremes of Phoenicia, Greece, and Rome, which carried your subtle-minded fathers around the world, skilled in trade and eloquence, and which, by a happy return, brings you the consecration of a great and old friendship, and the benefit of "French peace."

Gouraud goes on, detailing how Mount Lebanon will be unified with the four coastal cities and the Bekaa. By now, Phoenicia was famous enough and "real" enough to be used in a proclamation speech of a new state by the French Mandatory Power[58].

The Lebanese National Museum at Beirut was established in 1942, with the Phoenicians having the most eminent place, presented as the ancient inhabitants of Lebanon before Alexander. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the Louvre still lists the *Antiquités orientales* of Lebanon as "Liban (Phénicie)" (Louvre, *Ibid*).

It is sufficient to read some online encyclopaedias to understand how profound the Phoenician anachronism can go. The Wikipedia article on the subject[59] considers that Phoenicia comes to an end in 64 BCE with the Roman annexation. In other terms, the Wikipedia article places the "end of Phoenicia" when precisely Phoenicia begins. The Britannica article does the same[60]. The French dictionary *Larousse* gives a more fantastic account[61], according to which "Phoenicia was swept away by Hellenism and ceased to be a nation" after Alexander's conquests[62].

5. An anachronism named Phoenicia

"Phoenicia" went from being an abstract undefined place to be a "real" toponym, that is, a name of a specific administrative unit. Then it fell out of use. Later, the toponym was used, anachronistically, in archaeology and politics. This led to the creation of some alternative historical reality. The result might be represented in a diagram, an oversimplified one:

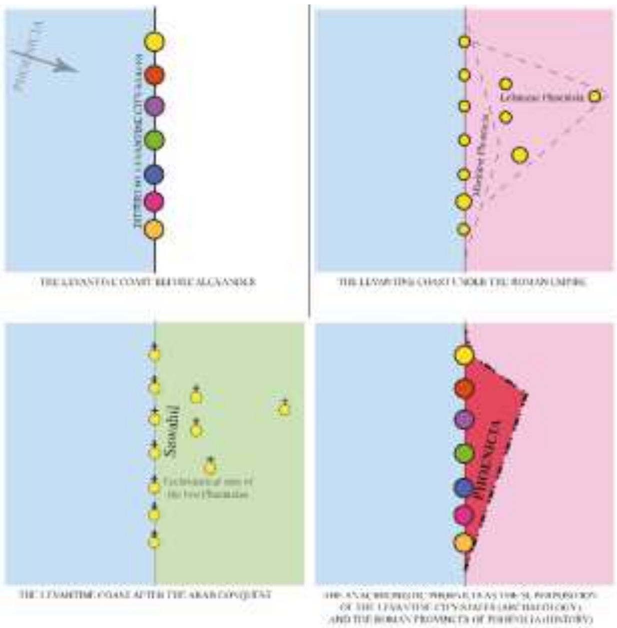


Figure 8. The invention of an anachronistic Phoenicia. Image by the author.

In the first phase, "Phoenicia" was an exonym used by the Greeks to refer to the different and independent Levantine city-states. These city-states did not share a collective identity and did not identify as Phoenician or as from Phoenicia. In the second Graeco-Roman phase, a Phoenicia was created as an administrative unit and later was divided into two distinct provinces. In the third phase under the Arabs, "Phoenicia" became a title used for Church hierarchy. In the fourth phase, related to the *Mission de Phénicie*, the Graeco-Roman toponym of Phoenicia is superposed onto the archaeological findings

[56] Elias Hoyek (1843-1931) was the Maronite patriarch from 1898 to his death. He is one of the fathers of the modern Lebanese state, and often hailed as "the Patriarch of Greater Lebanon."

[57] In French "Au bord de la mer légendaire qui vit les trirèmes de la Phénicie, de la Grèce et de Rome, qui porta par le monde vos pères à l'esprit subtil, habiles au négoce et à l'éloquence, et qui, par un heureux retour, vous apporte la consécration d'une grande et vieille amitié, et le bienfait de « la paix française »."

[58] The same Henri Lammens, SJ, who had reported Gouraud's speech, discredited the above-mentioned Roman Lebanese Phoenicia as "abusive" and "invented by Byzantines" because it is continental, not maritime (Lammens, 1921 [1], 13-14). In other terms, Lammens and French Mandatory authorities think that only Maritime Phoenicia is "true" and "historical."

[59] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicia. Accessed 21 March 2021.

[60] See https://www.britannica.com/place/Phoenicia. Accessed 21 March 2021.

[61] See https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/Ph%C3%A9niciens/137929. Accessed 21 March 2021.

[62] In French "Dès lors, emportée par l'hellénisme, la Phénicie cesse d'être une nation."

Proceedings of the International Cartographic Association, 3, 2021.
8th International Symposium of the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography, 21–23 April 2020, Istanbul, Turkey (rescheduled for December 2021, Florence, Italy). This contribution underwent single-blind peer review based on submitted abstracts.
https://doi.org/10.5194/ica-proc-3-9-2021

of the pre-Alexandrian city-states. The imaginary pre-Alexandrian Phoenicia is thus born out of a projection of the Biblical city-states of the ancient Levant into a toponym borrowed from the political geography of the Roman world. Ernest Renan, the planner of the founding archaeological mission to "unearth Phoenicia" in the Ottoman Realm, used the projection while being quite conscious of its paradoxical nature[63].

The "Phoenician anachronism" is not unique. Maybe the most famous anachronism is also related to an Empire that preceded the Ottoman Realm: the use of the place name "the Byzantine Empire" to refer to the Roman Empire when Constantinople was its Imperial seat (330-1453 CE). The use of the toponym "Byzantium" and "Byzantine Empire" created a "reality" and an erroneous history, according to which the Roman Empire ended in the 5th or 7th Century CE (For the explanation of this confusion see Ahrweiler, 1975; Kaldellis, 2019). But the Roman Empire continued without interruption until at least 1204.

The *Gaule* example is also well-known: the "Gaulois", as self-aware inhabitants of Gaul, were invented by the Third French Republic to create its *récit national*. How did the French approach to the *récit national* participate in shaping the Phoenician anachronism?

Maybe the closest case is the one of the toponym "Syria", itself a Graeco-Roman implementation. It has taken even more concrete dimensions as it was used for a newly founded state that is neither the continuation nor the succession of Roman Syria, but a successor state of the Ottoman Realm. In the Syrian Republic, the ancient toponym "Syria" was used and is used to justify Syrian claims over Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan (Keilo, 2020).

Back to our study: can we speak of pre-Alexandrian Phoenicia as a "country" with some collective identity, inhabitants self-identifying as Phoenician, and then use the place name accordingly? In politics and ideology, anachronisms are acceptable, even necessary. But, in political and historical geographies, if there ever was a united self-identifying Phoenicia, it was under the Roman Empire and in the Hellenic context, and not any other.

6. Acknowledgements

I thank ***L'Orient-Le Jour***, a leading Lebanese newspaper, for publishing the preparatory article of this study[64]. I also thank ***Travaux et Jours***, the peer-reviewed journal of the Saint-Joseph Jesuit University of Beirut (USJ), for giving me the chance to publish the preparatory article about the toponym "Syria"[65], closely related to "Phoenicia."

I am grateful to **Antoine Courban**, professor emeritus at the USJ. His profound knowledge about the history of the Levant and his review of the preparatory articles were of great help in writing the study.

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[63] This Phoenician anachronism became the representation of a golden age of an eternal Lebanese nation, and was used as a proof of a nation going back to times immemorial (Hojairi, 2011, 263-267).

[64] Available from https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1159740/la-phenicie-entre-realite-historique-et-recuperation-politique.html. Accessed 21 March 2021.

[65] Available from https://journals.usj.edu.lb/travauxetjours/article/view/354. Accessed 25 March 2021.

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Proceedings of the International Cartographic Association, 3, 2021.
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